VISIT…

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Getting Started

From low-cost independent exploration to luxury tours and every shade in between, China offers a sometimes bewildering choice of travel options. With China being so vast and travel experiences so varied, visitors need to take a long and hard look at the map, to determine exactly what it is that they want their China experience to be. The Itineraries chapter (p26) aims to provide you with options for your visit. The only part of China you will need to carefully plan is travel to Tibet, as bureaucratic obstacles, travel restrictions and health issues will require your consideration and attention.

WHEN TO GO

See Climate Charts (p938) for more information.

Travel to China is possible year-round, as long as you're prepared for what the season can throw at you. Spring (March to May) and autumn (September to early November) can be the best time to be on the road, as you avoid the blistering heat of summer (June to August) and stinging chill of winter (November to February/March). Autumn in Běijīng, for example, is particularly pleasant, as are early spring and autumn in Hong Kong. Summer is the busiest tourist season, and getting around and finding accommodation during the peak summer crush can be draining.

North China is hot and largely dry in summer, especially in the baking northwest (but Běijīng is also uncomfortable). The Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng) region is very hot and humid, and southern China, with a coastline harassed by typhoons, also swelters. Rainfall rarely falls in quantities that can disrupt travel plans, except on the southern coastline during the typhoon season.

Winter is the low season (except for Hǎinán) and can be the quietest time of year, but while Hong Kong in winter is comfortably nippy, north China is a frozen expanse, especially in the northeast, northwest and Inner Mongolia. Wintering in clement central and southern Yúnnán province is enjoyable, but the higher altitude north of the province is frigid. Winter is inadvisable for travel to high-altitude areas in China, although summer visits to high-lying areas such as Qīnghǎi and parts of Tibet can be recommended.

Major public holidays can make travel difficult, and sights can be crammed with vacating Chinese. Manoeuvring around China with 1.3 billion others at Chinese New Year (p944) can be daunting, but you also get to see the country at its most colourful and entertaining. Hotel rates (see the boxed text, opposite) become very expensive during the May Day holiday (now a week long from 1 May) and National Day on 1 October (likewise a week long), and train tickets can be difficult to procure.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

- Checking the visa situation (p953)
- Checking travel advisory bureaus
- Checking on your recommended vaccinations (p977)
- A copy of your travel insurance policy details (p946)
- Good deodorant – hard to find in China
- Reading matter for those endless train trips
- A sense of adventure

HOTEL ROOMS

Rack rates are quoted for hotels in this book, although generally the only time you will pay the full rate is during the major holiday periods, namely the first week of May, the first week of October and Chinese New Year. At other times, you can expect to receive discounts ranging between 10% and 50%. This does not apply to youth hostels or budget guesthouses, which tend to have set rates.

COSTS & MONEY

Once cheap, China has long become increasingly expensive. However, simply knowing where and how to travel according to your budget allows you to live well within your means.

The most expensive destinations are Hong Kong, Macau, Běijīng, Shànghǎi, Guǎngzhōu, the eastern coastal provinces and Special Economic Zones (SEZ). Běijīng and Shànghǎi especially can be intolerably dear. Look around, get savvy and acquire a sense of where locals shop. Quickly try to get a sense of proportion; be sensible and cautious about where you shop, and what you buy. Learn to haggle. Since you're using a new currency, take your time to accurately convert prices. Even Běijīng and Shànghǎi can be cheap if you're shrewd and careful.

Staying in dormitories – now an increasingly widespread option – travelling by bus or bicycle rather than taxi, eating from street stalls or small restaurants, refraining from buying anything and resisting the urge to splurge means it is possible to live on around US$25 (Y200) per day. Accommodation will take the largest chunk, but in cities where dormitory accommodation is unavailable you will have to settle for accommodation with rates from US$20 (Y160) for a double (singles are rarely available).

Western China and the interior remain relatively inexpensive. Popular backpacker getaways, such as Yúnnán, Sìchuān, Guǎngxī, Gānsù, Xīnjiāng, Qīnghǎi and Tibet, abound in budget accommodation and cheap eats.

Food costs remain reasonable throughout China, and the frugal can eat for as little as US$5 (Y40) a day. Transport costs can be kept to a minimum by travelling by bus or hard-seat on the train. Train travel is reasonable, and is generally about half the price of air travel. Flying in China is expensive, but discounting is the norm and those with less time will find it indispensable for covering vast distances.

Midrange hotel doubles start at around US$30 (Y240) and you can eat in midrange restaurants from around US$5 (Y40). Midrange comfort can be bought in China for around US$60 (Y480) a day, making it neither a very cheap nor an exorbitant way to see the land.

Top-end travel in China? Five-star hotel rooms can reach US$300 (Y2400) a night in the big cities and you can expect to pay upwards of US$100 (Y800) for a meal at one of the country's swishest restaurants. You'll find yourself well catered for, unless you venture too far from the big cities.

HOW MUCH?

Cigarettes: from Y3.5

International Herald Tribune from a five-star hotel: Y23

City bus ticket: Y1

Hour in an internet café: Y1.5-Y3

City map: Y3-5

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Fried Eggs with Chopsticks (2005) by Polly Evans, an occasionally hilarious account of travel around this huge country, is perhaps the perfect partner to pack for those long bus journeys.

Author Sun Shuyun follows in the footsteps of 7th-century Buddhist monk Xuanzang (who trekked to India from China to return with bundles of *sutras*), setting off along the Silk Road from Xī'ān in her absorbing *Ten Thousand Miles Without a Cloud* (2003). Ideal reading matter for travellers doing the northwest.

TOP TENS

Top Ten Movies

Some cinematic homework is a sure way to hit the ground running in China. The country's film genres sprawl from energetic Hong Kong *wǔdǎpiàn* (kung fu), violence and slapstick, through the decadent excesses of the mainland fifth generation to the sombre palate of the sixth generation and beyond.

- *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) Director: Zhang Yimou
- *Judou* (1989) Director: Zhang Yimou
- *Chungking Express* (1994) Director: Wong Kar Wai
- *City on Fire* (1987) Director: Ringo Lam
- *In the Mood for Love* (2000) Director: Wong Kar Wai
- *Drunken Master 2* (1994) Directors: Lau Karleung & Jackie Chan
- *Infernal Affairs* (2002) Directors: Lau Waikeung & Mak Siufai
- *Beijing Bicycle* (2001) Director: Wang Xiaoshuai
- *The Gate of Heavenly Peace* (1995) Directors: Richard Gordon & Carma Hinton
- *Farewell My Concubine* (1993) Director: Chen Kaige

Top Ten Reads

Getting some paperwork can also gear you up for your China trip, so try some of the following penned by Chinese and non-Chinese authors.

- *The China Dream: The Elusive Quest for the Greatest Untapped Market on Earth* (2002) Joe Studwell
- *Mao: The Unknown Story* (2005) Jung Chang & Jon Halliday
- *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road* (1984) Peter Hopkirk
- *The Chinese* (2001) Jasper Becker
- *The Tiananmen Papers* (2001) Compiled by Zhang Liang; edited by Andrew Nathan and Perry Link
- *God's Chinese Son* (1997) Jonathan Spence
- *The Search for Modern China* (1991) Jonathan Spence
- *Soul Mountain* (2000) Gao Xingjian
- *The Rape of Nanking* (1998) Iris Chang
- *The Republic of Wine* (2001) Mo Yan

Top Ten Temples

China's far-flung temple brood can have your compass spinning as fast as your head, but ease the way and pick from this definitive list of top shrines.

- Lama Temple, Běijīng (p134)
- Temple of Heaven, Běijīng (p130)
- Puning Temple, Chéngdé (p193)
- Tashilhunpo Monastery, Shigatse, Tibet (p930)
- Labrang Monastery, Gānsù (p856)
- Jokhang Temple, Lhasa (p920)
- Confucius Temple, Qūfù (p220)
- Tā'ěr Sì, Around Xīníng, Qīnghǎi (p903)
- Dai Temple, Tài'ān (p211)
- Dafo Temple, Zhèngdìng (p189)

A vivid and gritty account of his penniless three-year meandering around China in the 1980s, *Red Dust* (2001) by Ma Jian traces the author's flight from the authorities in Běijīng to the remotest corners of the land.

River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze (2001) by Peter Hessler is full of poignant and telling episodes during the author's posting as an English teacher in the town of Fúlíng on the Yangzi River. Hessler perfectly captures the experience of being a foreigner in today's China in his observations of the local people.

Revolving around the same waterway, *The River at the Centre of the World* (1998) by Simon Winchester follows the author on his journey along the river from the mouth of the Yangzi River north of Shànghǎi to its source high up on the Tibet–Qinghai plateau.

First published in hardback in 1936, *News from Tartary: A Journey from Peking to Kashmir* by Peter Fleming is a classic account of the author's journey from China to India during a chaotic chapter in China's history.

INTERNET RESOURCES

China Minority Travel (www.china-travel.nl) Offers tailor-made trips to south China and Tibet.
China.org.cn (www.china.org.cn) Sanitised info on all aspects of China and up-to-the-minute news in 10 languages, including Esperanto.
China Today (www.chinatoday.com) Reams of info on China.
Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) Useful summaries on travelling through China and travel tips from travellers on the Thorn Tree Travel Forum.
WildChina (www.wildchina.com) Far-flung treks around China, organised within China. Monthly email newsletter.
Zhongwen: Chinese Characters and Culture (www.zhongwen.com) Includes a pinyin chat room and an online dictionary of Chinese characters.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

SOUTHWEST TOUR

Two to Four Weeks/Hong Kong to Yúnnán

Four days in **Hong Kong** (p518) and **Macau** (p566) will prime you for deeper forays into China proper, with a night or two in **Guǎngzhōu** (p587) for the city and its surrounding sights before jumping on a sleeper (train or bus) to **Guìlín** (p650) for classic views and a boat trip to famed **Yángshuò** (p656). Some travellers are seduced by Yángshuò's otherworldly landscapes into long sojourns, so prepare to overstay. Backtrack to Guìlín and hop on a bus to **Lóngshèng** (p663) and **Sānjiāng** (p664), not far from the Guǎngxī–Guìzhōu border, for its spectacular blend of scenery and minority villages. If you have time, incursions over the border into minority-rich **Guìzhōu** (p666) are tempting diversions. Onward travel from Guìlín to **Kūnmíng** (p688) by train or plane allows you to spend a few days there before flying or taking the bus northwest to **Dàlǐ** (p703) and from there on to **Lìjiāng** (p709). Alternatively, fly or take the bus to the fertile **Xīshuāngbǎnnà region** (p730) south of Kūnmíng, where an abundance of hiking opportunities around China's southwest borders rounds off your tour.

You'll be journeying to some of China's most alluring destinations on this 2000km tour, taking in key landscape panoramas and ethnic minority areas. The journey can be done in a whistle-stop few weeks or less, but a month will give you time to savour the region.

THE HISTORY TOUR: BĚIJĪNG TO THE SILK ROAD

Three to Four Weeks/Běijīng to Xī'ān & Dūnhuáng

Four days in **Běijīng** (p110) should be ample for its sights, from the **Great Wall** (p162) to the **Forbidden City** (p133) and the **Summer Palace** (p139). Take the bus or train to **Dàtóng** (p413) in Shānxī to gawp at the Buddhist magnificence of the **Yungang Caves** (p416) outside town. Hop on a bus from Dàtóng to the Buddhist mountain of **Wǔtái Shān** (p411) for several days before bussing it to **Tàiyuán** (p404) en route to the old walled town of **Píngyáo** (p407). A detour east by train from Tàiyuán to **Shíjiāzhuāng** (p186) and the charming temple town of **Zhèngdìng** (p189) north of the city is eminently feasible. From Tàiyuán take the train south to explore the historic walled city of **Kāifēng** (p468), traditional home of China's Jews, before heading west by train to the former dynastic capital of **Luòyáng** (p462) and the magnificent Buddhist spectacle of the **Longmen Caves** (p465). Take the train west again from Luòyáng to **Xī'ān** (p420) for four days of sightseeing in the former capital of the Tang dynasty, visiting the **Army of Terracotta Warriors** (p428) and clambering up the Buddhist mountain of **Huá Shān** (p433). Xī'ān traditionally marked the start of the Silk Road and the **Mogao Caves** (p866) outside **Dūnhuáng** (p864) – reachable by plane from Xī'ān – is one of the trade route's most spectacular marvels. Return to Běijīng by plane from either Xī'ān or Dūnhuáng.

For many travellers, this tour is what coming to China is all about. Spanning around 2500km from Běijīng to Dūnhuáng, you will be visiting the major imperial monuments – including the Great Wall and the Terracotta Army – and religious sites of North China. Manageable in three weeks, a month-long tour would allow for a more relaxed expedition.

COASTAL HIGHLIGHTS & TREATY PORTS TOUR Three to Four Weeks/ Běijīng to Hong Kong & Macau

Having toured **Běijīng** (p110), take the train to **Tiānjīn** (p177) and spend a day wandering around its historic collection of European-style buildings. From Tiānjīn jump on the train for two days at least to breezy **Qīngdǎo** (p224), the port city in Shāndōng province graced with impressive early-20th-century German architecture. From Qīngdǎo take the overnight train to **Jǐ'nán** (p206) and seek out the earthy charms of the Ming and Qing dynasty village of **Zhūjiāyù** (p210). From Jǐ'nán, continue by train to booming **Shànghǎi** (p237) – stopping off in **Tài'ān** (p211) to climb **Tài Shān** (p214) if you have slack in your itinerary. Spend three days touring Shànghǎi's intoxicating mix of old European-style buildings and dashing modern architecture before doing day trips to the gardens and temples of **Sūzhōu** (p302) and the canal scenes of **Tónglǐ** (p310). From Shànghǎi take the train to famed **Hángzhōu** (p315) for several days in the historic capital of Zhèjiāng. Then board the overnight sleeper to coastal **Xiàmén** (p344) for two days exploring the pleasant port city and admiring the gorgeous, historic European architecture and charm of sleepy **Gǔlàng Yǔ** (p348). An inevitable conclusion to this loop along the coast comes with three days in **Hong Kong** (p518), perched on the south of Guǎngdōng, with the Chinese-Portuguese heritage of **Macau** (p566) a short boat trip away.

Voyaging down the eastern flank of China from Běijīng to Hong Kong, this tour covers over 3000km, taking in the major highlights and historic maritime towns along the coast. One of China's most fascinating journeys, this three- to four-week trip passes through some of the must-see sights of Qīngdǎo, Sūzhōu, Shànghǎi and Hángzhōu.

ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

QĪNGHǍI TO SÌCHUĀN One Week/Xīníng to Chéngdū

Skirt the flanks of Tibet on your way from **Xīníng** (p901) to **Chéngdū** (p754) in Sìchuān. The scenery en route is magnificent and perfect for a more offbeat China experience – but do this trip only in summer (it can be dangerously cold even in spring) and take lots of food with you (you won't be able to change money or cash travellers cheques). Be prepared for wild dogs, bus breakdowns, irregular transport connections and basic accommodation. You can jump on a sleeper bus or plane (if Yùshù's airport is open, ask in Xīníng) from Xīníng to the trading town of **Yùshù** (Jyekundo; p908) in the south of Qīnghǎi, which stages a marvellous annual horse festival on 25 July. Spend several days visiting the surrounding monasteries and exploring the deeply Tibetan disposition of the region and its valleys. Trips south into Tibet are feasible but check first (p911). Hop on a minibus to **Xiēwú** (Zhiwu; p910) and continue east to **Sêrshu Dzong** (Shíqú; p788) in northwest Sìchuān and on to **Sêrshu** (Shíqú Xiàn; p788), where bus connections run through some stunning scenery all the way to **Kāngdìng** (Dardo; p778), via **Manigango** (Yùlóng; p786) and **Gānzī** (Ganze; p785). Continue along the Sìchuān–Tibet Hwy by bus to Kāngdìng and then on to Chéngdū.

Traversing the wilds of western China, this spectacular overland 1000km+ tour takes you into Sìchuān through the mountainous back door from Qīnghǎi. Manageable in one week, allow more time for unforeseen complications and prepare for rough, no-frills travel.

YÚNNÁN INTO TIBET

Eight Days/Lijiāng to Lhasa

Kick off this trip walking **Tiger Leaping Gorge** (p718), north of gorgeous **Lìjiāng** (p709), before taking the bus to **Shangri-la** (Zhōngdiàn; **p724**), where your adventure proper begins. This epic, once-in-a-lifetime journey takes you from Shangri-la (Tibetan name: Gyalthang) through a breathtaking landscape of valleys, mountains and Tibetan villages to **Lhasa** (p917) in Tibet. You'll need a minimum of eight days for the trip, and the optimum months for travel are late spring (April and May) and autumn (September and October); winter is definitely out as the route crosses half a dozen passes over 4500m. Embark on this journey only if you are in good health (medical facilities en route are basic) and ensure you read the Health chapter for information on acute mountain sickness (p982). Joining a tour (which can arrange all the necessary permits, vehicle, driver and guide for you) is the best and safest way as individual travel through Tibet is not permitted, but increasing numbers of travellers are hitching through reportedly with little hassle. Several outfits (p726) in Shangri-la can make all the necessary arrangements. Your first stop after Shangri-la is **Déqīn** (Dechen; p727) before reaching the town of **Yánjǐng** (Yandin) in southeastern Tibet's Chamdo Prefecture. Continue your journey by road to **Markam** (Mángkāng), then west to **Dzogang** (Zuǒgòng) and on to **Pasho** (Bāsù) via **Pomda** (Bāngdá; Bamda). The journey then continues to **Rawok** (Ranwu) and the gorgeous alpine lake of **Rawok-tso**, and on to Lhasa via **Pomi** and **Bayi**. From Lhasa, you then have the option of taking the train into China proper, to Běijīng, Shànghǎi or virtually any other part of the land.

This enticing 1000km+ overland adventure takes you from southwest China into Tibet through some of China's most visually spectacular scenery. Concluding in Lhasa, the tour will involve considerable preparatory work (and flexibility time-wise), but it's second to none for those seeking a more exploratory taste of China.

TAILORED TRIPS

CHINA'S TRADITIONAL VILLAGES

For barrel loads of rusticity, start this bucolic tour with a visit to **Chuāndǐxià** (p176) outside Běijīng before journeying to the ancient authentically unspoiled village of **Zhūjiāyù** (p210) in Shāndōng. From Jǐ'nán voyage west to the ancient stony hamlet of **Yújiācūn** (p190) in Héběi before popping down south to the high-altitude, tranquil village of **Guōliàngcūn** (p467) in Hénán, but pack a torch for power cuts and an easel and canvas for the views. You're literally spoiled for choice in southern Ānhuī, where a cluster of irresistible villages – **Hóngcūn** (p444), **Xīdì** (p443), **Nánpíng** (p444), **Guānlù** (p444) and **Yúliáng** (p445) – vie for your attention. Just across the border in northeastern Jiāngxī, the villages surrounding **Wùyuán** (p494), including **Lǐkēng** (p495), **Xiǎoqī** (p496) and **Qīnghuá** (p495), lie embedded in some of China's most idyllic scenery. Also in Jiāngxī, the trinity of small villages around **Luótiáncūn** (p491) makes a great escape from drab Nánchāng. To the west, Húnán abounds with minority villages and towns, from **Déhāng** (p511) to riverine **Fènghuáng** (p512), and intrepid explorers could even make the long trip to the isolated Tujia village of **Yúmùzhài** (p486) in the far-off southwestern corner of Húběi. Continue west to the ancient town of **Lǎngzhōng** (p768) in Sìchuān before rounding off your trip by seeking out the 600-year-old village of **Dǎngjiācūn** (p435) outside Hánchéng in Shaanxi.

CHINA'S SACRED SITES

Follow the temple trail around **Běijīng** (p110) and journey to **Chéngdé** (p191) to stand in amazement before the divine statue of Guanyin (p196) in **Puning Temple** (p193). Travel southwest to the Buddhist mountain of **Wǔtái Shān** (p411) for its constellation of Buddhist shrines, before voyaging southeast to **Zhèngdìng** (p189) for a lazy stroll around its charming legacy of pagodas and temples. East in Shāndōng rises massive **Tài Shān** (p214), China's most sacred Taoist peak, overlooking the magnificent **Dai Temple** (p211). The Buddhist Goddess of Compassion (p196) dwells on **Pǔtuóshān** (p332), off the Zhèjiāng coast. Rising up from Hénán province, Sōng Shān is home to the renowned **Shaolin Temple** (p460) and its legendary band of warrior monks. Outside **Luòyáng** (p462), the Buddhist **Longmen Caves** (p465) draw both the devout and sightseers, while west again in Shaanxi, **Xī'ān** (p420), famed for its Tang dynasty pagodas, is the gateway to Taoist **Huá Shān** (p433). Martial arts students can immerse themselves in the Taoist mysteries of **Wǔdāng Shān** (p481) to the southeast, while **Éméi Shān** (p769), in Sìchuān to the southwest, is one of China's most celebrated Buddhist peaks. The world's largest Buddha sits at nearby **Lèshān** (p774). In the far west rises Tibet, with its unique and idiosyncratic Buddhist traditions, exemplified by **Jokhang Temple** (p920), **Barkhor** (p919), **Potala Palace** (p920), **Samye Monastery** (p927) and **Tashilhunpo Monastery** (p930) in **Shigatse** (p929).

THE SUPERLATIVE TOUR

China abounds with superlatives, from the world's highest lake to the planet's largest statue of Buddha. Kick off your trip in **Hong Kong** (p518), where you can take a ride on the **Mid-Levels Escalator** (p523), the world's longest escalator. East along the coast, **Shànghǎi** (p237) inevitably has a crop of superlatives: the stunning **Jinmao Tower** (p256) – the tallest building in China – contains the world's longest laundry chute and the world's tallest atrium, both in the **Grand Hyatt** (p262), the world's highest hotel above ground level. A journey by boat (p811) from **Chóngqíng** (p799) – by some estimates the world's largest city – through the **Three Gorges** (p811) gets you up close to the biggest **dam** (p484) in the world, while a trip to **Běijīng** (p110) brings you to the world's largest public square – **Tiananmen Square** (p124) – and the world's longest fortification, the **Great Wall** (p162).

Head to **Chéngdé** (p191) to gaze at the world's largest wooden statue (Guanyin) in Puning Temple and size up the world's largest Buddha at **Lèshān** (p774). If you get as far to **Ürümqi** (p821), make a note that you're in the world's furthest city from the sea. Naturally **Tibet** (p912) has a few choice superlatives, including the **world's highest railway above sea level** (p924), **Nam-tso Lake** (p927), the highest lake in the world, and **Mt Everest** (p932), the world's highest mountain. While taking the superlative tour, look around you at the Chinese, the most populous population on earth.

WORLD HERITAGE SITES

China has over 30 Unesco World Heritage Sites; **Běijīng** (p110) alone has the **Forbidden City** (p133) at the heart of the capital, the **Summer Palace** (p139) and the **Temple of Heaven** (p130), and outside the city, the **Great Wall** (p162), the **Ming Tombs** (p174) and **Eastern Qing Tombs** (p175). En route to the Manchu **Imperial Palace** (p359) in **Shěnyáng** (p358), stop off in **Chéngdé** (p191) to admire the **Bìshǔ Shānzhuāng** (p192) and the **Eight Outer Temples** (p193). The quaint town of **Píngyáo** (p407) is a charming snapshot of old China. Also in Shānxī, the **Yungang Caves** (p416) have – like the **Mogao Caves** (p866), **Longmen Caves** (p465) and the **Dàzú County grotto art** (p809) – the most important array of Buddhist carvings in China. In Shāndōng the Taoist mountain of **Tài Shān** (p214) and the hometown of Confucius, **Qūfù** (p218), are places of national veneration. China's most picturesque peak is surely **Huáng Shān** (p446), but there are other mountains, including **Éméi Shān** (p769) and **Qīngchéng Shān** (p766), and the European charms of **Lúshān** (p497). The classic gardens of **Sūzhōu** (p302) are a picturesque tableau, but if you want rugged and scenic getaways, explore **Jiǔzhàigōu** (p795), **Wǔlíngyuán** (p515), **Huánglóng** (p794) or **Wǔyí Shān** (p353), although expect tourist hordes to accompany you. The **Historic Centre of Macau** (p566) brings a charming Portuguese flavour to your China trip, **Hóngcūn** (p444) and **Xīdì** (p443) are both beautiful villages in south Ānhuī, while **Lijiāng** (p709) remains lovely. The whole of Tibet to the northwest deserves to be a World Heritage Site; for now only the **Potala Palace** (p920) in Lhasa gets on the list.

Snapshot

A land curiously both in the throes of dramatic transition yet somehow eternally the same, China is certainly going places. A railway – a contraption once abhorred for its negative effects on feng shui and ruinous interference with ancestral graves – now links dusty Běijīng in the arid north of China with Lhasa in far-off Tibet, lashing this last region by rail to the Chinese heartland. The train's engines will be fed oxygen in the thin air, and so will the passengers, who will no doubt savour the pure gas after enduring Běijīng's notoriously foggy haze (see The Great Pall of China boxed text, p113).

The monumental Three Gorges Dam, cloaked in as much controversy as the banks of mist that roll along the Yangzi River (Cháng Jiāng), was completed in 2006, three years ahead of schedule. China lifted man into space for the first time in 2003, a feat it repeated in 2005, and you can rocket from Shànghǎi's Pudong airport into town at a blinding 430km/h on China's first Maglev train (although your hair can turn grey waiting for your rush-hour bus to move on Běijīng's congested streets).

China reportedly sucks up half the world's concrete and a third of its steel, and nearly half of all tropical hardwood logs are destined for China's growing square kilometres of wood strip flooring. Sex-toy shops are ubiquitous in China from Ānyáng to Jǐngdézhèn, a fact underscored by a piece of trivia that would have Mao Zedong gyrating in his mausoleum: 70% of the world's sex toys are 'Made in China'. The local instinct for capitalist opportunism sharpened further when touts started buying up queue tickets at China's notoriously slow-moving banks and selling them off to the highest bidder as the numbers drew near.

The country is facing a shortage of pilots to fly its growing fleet of commercial airplanes and industry insiders suggest that over 100 foreign pilots are now in the skies above China, in defiance of government regulations. Gazing into the future, if three out of four Chinese people own a car, a fleet of 1.1 billion cars will be competing for parking spaces. Little wonder car manufacturers are sick with excitement.

The thrill and trauma of change is everywhere. In its mad dash to turn itself into a modern citadel, Běijīng has irretrievably obliterated much of its precious history. As the Chinese-American architect IM Pei has observed, city planners should have kept the magnificent city walls and built the skyscrapers outside. To ease its conscience, Běijīng paradoxically rebuilt the magnificent Yongding Gate (although the facsimile fails to match the original) after felling it in the 1950s.

If high-rises float your boat, go to Shànghǎi, which now has nearly double the number of skyscrapers as New York. The only way is up, one might say, and Shànghǎi's streets change appearance almost overnight, but the city still has to deal with its yellow tap water, overpowering pollution and traffic congestion that is rivalling Běijīng's epic gridlock.

Famed for their exotic tastes, Chinese diners, who get through 45 billion pairs of chopsticks annually, were recently treated to China's first restaurant specialising in yak, donkey and seal penises, which opened in Běijīng. If that's not your cup of *cha,* the latest fad is delicious Chinese Tujia pizza, a savoury and aromatic disc of bread sprinkled with crumbs of meat that should set you back a mere Y2.

Pollution continues to have a ruinous effect on the land. In 2005 a senior environmental official warned that pollution levels could quadruple within

FAST FACTS: CHINA

Population: 1.3 billion

Life expectancy male/female: 70.4/73.7 years

GDP growth: 9.6%

GDP per capita: US$6800

Adult literacy: 86%

Internet users: 134 million

Major exports: textiles, clothing, footwear, toys and machinery

Religions: Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, Christianity

Number of Chinese characters: over 56,000

15 years, unless serious efforts were made to make the country more energy efficient.

Bird flu, the source of so much global panic in 2005–06, infected large numbers of birds in China, but fortunately has so far failed to mutate into a form transmissible from person to person. Even so, a run on Tamiflu saw Shànghǎi chemists rapidly running out of the drug, which then resurfaced on the black market with a hefty mark-up.

North China's drought shows little sign of abating. Tiānjīn now reportedly has per capita water supplies lower than Saudi Arabia's, and China has the world's most developed rain-seeding program. The US$64 billion north-south water diversion project aims to suck water from the Yangzi River to slake the thirst of the increasingly parched north.

China's awkward tango with the internet took a further stumble when a fire in 2002 in an internet café left many dead. The authorities responded by closing thousands of internet cafés throughout the nation. Běijīng's population of internet cafés is well down on just a few years ago, but employment is assured for a reputed 30,000 cyberspace police who strictly monitor content and weed out foreign pollutants, such as the BBC News website and Wikipedia.

All is not well down on the farm, as countryside unrest grows in both frequency and severity. Official Chinese figures report 74,000 incidents (riots or illegal demonstrations), many of them rural, in 2004.

The Authors

DAMIAN HARPER

Coordinating author, Ānhuī, Shànghǎi, Jiāngxī, Húnán & Cruising the Yangzi

A growing penchant for taichi and a meandering career in bookselling (London, Dublin, Paris) persuaded Damian to opt for a four-year degree in Chinese at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. A year of study in Běijīng and employment in Hong Kong further honed his irrepressible tendencies for wandering, inclinations that have led Damian to contribute to over a dozen guidebooks for Lonely Planet, including *Shanghai*, *Beijing*, *Hong Kong*, *China* and *Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei*. Married with two children, Damian and his family divide their time between China and Honor Oak Park in southeast London.

The Coordinating Author's Favourite Trip

After spending a week in autumnal Běijīng (p110), I'll get seaside Qīngdǎo (p224) on my itinerary but squeeze in a night in Zhūjiāyù (p210) for its earthy charms. Heading to Hénán, I'll rustle up transport to the mountain-top village of Guōliàngcūn (p467) for a night, before taking the train to Shànghǎi (p237) from Zhèngzhōu (p457) for a complete contrast. From Shànghǎi, I'll ride hard sleeper on an overnight train to Túnxī (p441) for its surrounding villages and mountains and the magnificence of Huáng Shān (p446). From Túnxī I'll take a bus across the border to Wùyuán (p494) for its idyllic countryside and traditional village panoramas, from where I'll make my way to Macau (p518) and Hong Kong (p518) to be tempted into flying to Kūnmíng (p688) for an exploration of Yúnnán province.

ANDREW BURKE

Hong Kong, Macau & Hǎinán

Andrew's relationship with Hong Kong began when he moved there in 2001. Since then he has experienced first-hand the ongoing evolution of this city that never sleeps, and its increasingly less sleepy neighbour, Macau. He worked at the *South China Morning Post* newspaper during the dark days of SARS, marched in Hong Kong's 500,000-strong protest of 1 July 2003, and developed an abiding affection for the region, despite the pollution. Today Andrew calls Bangkok home but gets back to Hong Kong at least once a year, working as a journalist and photographer. This is his 10th book for Lonely Planet, a list that includes Lonely Planet's *Hong Kong Citiescape*.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on www.lonelyplanet.com.

JULIE GRUNDVIG

The Culture, Food & Drink, Jiāngsū, Zhèjiāng, Fújiàn & Guǎngdōng

Julie first travelled to mainland China in the early 1990s where she hitchhiked her way from Yúnnán to Xīnjiāng, before finally settling in Xī'ān to study Chinese art and literature. Later came an MA in classical Chinese and a stint in Běijīng teaching English and working in an art gallery. She is currently associate editor for the journal *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* and coauthor/contributor of several Lonely Planet titles, including *Taiwan* and *China*. She currently lives in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

CAROLYN B HELLER

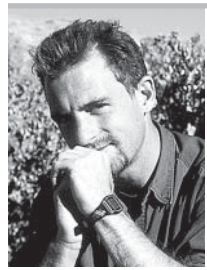
Liáoníng, Jílín, Hēilóngjiāng & Inner Mongolia

Carolyn has been fascinated with China since she first discovered egg rolls at the Dragon Inn in her hometown of Bloomington, Indiana. She's an avid traveller and passionate food-lover who has eaten on the streets, in fine restaurants, and everywhere in-between in nearly 40 countries. She has written for publications ranging from the *Boston Globe*, the *Zagat Survey* and the *Los Angeles Times* to *FamilyFun* magazine and *Travelers' Tales Paris*. She lives with her husband and daughters in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she studies Mandarin and eats Chinese food whenever she can. This is her third book for Lonely Planet.

THOMAS HUHTI

Sìchuān, Tibet & Xīnjiāng

Thomas hails from Wisconsin in the US and still calls it home when not lugging his pack around the world. A linguistics major in university, he chanced upon Mandarin while fleeing the pesky grammar of Indo-European. A semester abroad was followed by a two-year language and research stint in Taiwan and the People's Republic of China. He spent five years bumming the planet as a freelance writer before joining Lonely Planet. Among other books, this is his fifth tour of duty on *China;* he also coauthored the first edition of *Southwest China*. He would always rather be playing ice hockey or tromping through forests with his yellow lab Bighead Bobo.



BRADLEY MAYHEW

Gānsù, Níngxià & Qīnghǎi

Bradley started travelling in China almost 20 years ago while studying Chinese (Oriental Studies) at Oxford University. He's since been back over 20 times and has made it to almost every remote corner of western and southwestern China. At various times he's led adventure tours along the Silk Road and even worked for a while in Běijīng for a company trying to import *Sesame Street*. More recently he wrote the first two editions of Lonely Planet's *Shanghai* and *Southwest China* guides. These days he lives in Yellowstone County, Montana, where he tries in vain to get a decent flight connection to Asia. He is the coauthor of Lonely Planet guides to *Bhutan, Tibet, Nepal* and *Central Asia*.

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MIN DAI

Běijīng, Tiānjīn, Shāndōng, Hénán & Húběi

Originally hailing from Shāndōng province in north China, Min Dai has spent much of her working life with deadlines breathing down her neck, from submitting news online for the BBC World Service to knocking hefty translation projects into shape and researching and writing for Lonely Planet, while keeping her two children amused and entertained. A student for four years in Běijīng, Min Dai currently lives in Shànghǎi, nursing plans to eventually return to north China via Honor Oak Park in south London, her other home.

CHRISTOPHER PITTS

Héběi, Shānxī & Shaanxi

Born in the year of the Tiger, Chris' first expedition to China ended in failure when he tried to dig there from Pennsylvania at the age of six. Hardened by reality but still infinitely curious about the other side of the world, he went on to study Chinese literature in Colorado, Kūnmíng and Táinán, offsetting his years abroad by working in a Chinese bookstore in San Francisco and as an editor in Berkeley. A chance meeting in a Taiwanese elevator wound up letting him off in Paris, where he currently lives with his family, Perrine, Elliot and Céleste. He is also the coauthor of Lonely Planet's *Shanghai*.

EILÍS QUINN

Guǎngxī, Guìzhōu, Yúnnán & Chóngqìng

Eilís grew up in Vancouver, Canada, where visits to the city's mammoth Chinatown sowed a fascination with China and foreign languages. A degree in East Asian Studies finally took her to the Middle Kingdom for real, where she landed at university in southwest China. Back in Canada, with degrees in Chinese, Russian and German, she resisted the pull of yet another language BA and opted for journalism instead. She went on to toil in the newsrooms of the Canadian Press news wire service, the *New York Daily News,* the *Toronto Star* and the *Montreal Gazette*. She previously worked on Lonely Planet's *Best of Beijing* and now lives in Montreal.

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CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

David Andrew wrote the Environment chapter. David's passion for wildlife has led him to study and write about the subject in all corners of the globe. As a biologist he has studied giant pandas in southwest China and seabirds in Antarctica, and as an author he has written or cowritten all five of Lonely Planet's *Watching Wildlife* series. He was the founding editor of Birds Australia's *Wingspan* magazine and a former editor of *Wildlife Australia*; and has travelled to and written about wildlife and ecotourism in places as diverse as Madagascar, the Galápagos Islands, Borneo and New Guinea.

Dr Trish Batchelor wrote the Health chapter and has specialised in travel medicine for over 15 years. She has travelled extensively in Asia, Africa and South America and has worked for extended periods in India and Nepal. She has a particular passion for high-altitude trekking and a special interest in the impact of tourism on host countries. She is currently medical director of The Travel Doctor clinic in Canberra, Australia, medical advisor to The Travel Doctor group in New Zealand, and is a committee chairperson in the International Society of Travel Medicine.

Lin Gu wrote the Coming Home boxed text in the History chapter. He recently left a position as Beijing-based writer for *China Features* and joined the Graduate School of Journalism at UC Berkeley as a visiting scholar. In eight years covering China, he has reported on a number of issues, including social migration and environmental protection. Lin was a regular contributor to the radio talk programmes which replaced Alistair Cooke's 'Letter from America' on Alistair's death. He has also written and presented on current affairs in China for the BBC. Lin has a master's degree in social anthropology from Cambridge University and was the two-time recipient of the Developing Asia Journalism Award for his coverage of the AIDS crisis in China and controversy over genetically modified rice in the country.

Calum MacLeod wrote the Head in the Clouds – Pride & Propaganda boxed text in the Tibet chapter. He came to China on a gap year in 1988, and hasn't really left. After learning Chinese at Oxford University, he helped found factories in China making condoms, cider and other essentials, then coauthored the oral history *China Remembers*. He is now the China correspondent for *USA Today*.

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